



Spring 2021 Schedule FAQ

1. What is the planned schedule for the spring 2021 semester?

The spring 2021 schedule will include 4 sessions:

Full semester	15 weeks	January 25 – May 16
Spring 2021 Pt 1	7 weeks	January 25 – March 14
Spring 2021 Pt 2	7 weeks	March 29 – May 16
2-week late-start	13 weeks	February 8 – May 16

The spring schedule also includes a 5-week winter session:

Winter session	5 weeks	December 21 – January 22
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Spring break is scheduled for March 15 – 20.

There is an additional week after spring break before Spring Pt. 2 begins.

Final exams for 15-week and 13-week classes will be May 10 – 16.

Finals for the 7-week classes will be held on the last class day.

Winter session, 15-week, late-start, and 7-week classes will be offered in DL and SRT format. It is also the intention, provided conditions allow and it is safe to do so, to offer regular face-to-face (F2F) classes in the second half of the spring semester.

A Collegewide goal is to offer approximately 30% of Spring 2021 sections in a 15-week format and 70% in winter or 7-week formats. The goal is flexible, and schedules will be adjusted as enrollments dictate. Ultimately, student demand will determine the Spring 2021 schedule.

2. How were the changes to the college calendar approved?

The calendar was approved by Dr. Pollard last year via a recommendation from the calendar committee. The only change that was made was to eliminate the 3-week winter term. The extended winter session, which is 5-weeks, and the 7-week and 15-week sessions during fall and spring semester have been on the calendar for a year. 7-week sessions have been part of the standard semester schedule for years.

There was no change to the calendar. Therefore, no further approval was required.

3. Why was the decision made to increase the number of 7-week courses in Spring 2021?

Montgomery College is experiencing enrollment upheavals due to the pandemic, as are all higher education institutions. Enrollment in the 2020 shorter summer sessions was strong, and it is considerably higher in the fall 2020 enrollment for 7-week classes. The

enrollment in 15-week fall semester classes is considerably lower. Students have demonstrated a preference for shorter format classes and are indicating that they want more flexibility. Also, the Hope Center Survey conducted in summer 2020 that involved 3,500 MC students showed that the majority of our students have either lost employment or have a reduced number of hours of employment. Because of financial hardship and unpredictability the pandemic presents, our students are having difficulty committing to 15-week courses. Finally, the survey of MC employees conducted during the summer shows that a large majority of our employees are not feeling safe, or due to family circumstances, are reluctant to return to campus.

4. Why was this decision made before faculty had a chance to weigh in?

The spring draft schedule is due in July each year. However, the pandemic has impacted the regularity of determining the schedule. Further, the spring schedule was delayed due to the enrollment picture for fall 2020, which shows a strong preference for the 7-week course offerings. The announcement about the spring schedule was held until faculty returned for professional week. It was on the agenda of the Academic Affairs division meeting, all VPP meetings, and deans' meetings. In ideal circumstances, the process would include greater faculty and faculty leadership involvement, but this was an evolving situation and options were limited.

Throughout the Spring 2020 semester, faculty and faculty leadership were engaged in all decisions. The Faculty Council chairs, and the AAUP and SEIU presidents were members of Academic Affairs Expanded Advisory Council that met weekly and deliberated issues and made recommendations on summer scheduling, SRT, fall options, guided self-placements, and new grades of Withdrawal in Crisis (WC) and Incomplete in Crisis (IC). These recommendations were further deliberated by CAPDI, Academic Regs, and SALT before the final decision was made. College leadership was engaged and transparent, and decisions followed the entire governance process in spite of the circumstances created by the pandemic.

5. Is this decision final? Can faculty give input into the decisions on what is 7 versus 15 weeks?

The scheduling process is underway for spring 2021. If faculty would like to provide input or suggestions, please provide them to chairs and deans. This scheduling approach is in alignment with our fall approach; it simply includes more opportunity for 7-week courses in spring 2021. The schedule is built at the chair and dean level, making this the appropriate place to have this conversation.

6. Will all winter classes currently on the schedule be changed to 5 weeks?

Some 3-week classes that can be taught in the online or SRT format may be converted to the 5-week extended winter class schedule. There will be no regular 3-week, face-to-face classes offered in this winter session. Faculty who wish to convert their 3-week courses to the 5-week extended winter session should discuss this request with their chair and dean.

- 7. Will all courses be taught in the 7-week format during spring 2021?**
As a rule of thumb, courses that have not been taught in summer, winter, or 7-week sessions over the last few years should be offered in a 15-week semester format. Classes that meet once a week in 15 weeks would meet twice a week in 7 weeks. Weekend courses will likely remain in a 15-week format. Courses that have been taught over the summer may be offered in 7-week sessions. It is also likely that some sections of these courses may also be offered over the 15-week semester format. Disciplines may also choose to offer some courses in the 7-week sessions for the first time. This decision will be made in collaboration with the dean and chair.
- 8. How will honors programs be affected by the change to a 7-week format?**
Honors programs that have built their curricula on a full-semester plan will remain in a 15-week format. The learning communities within the honors programs feature integrated courses that would be difficult to convert to a 7-week format. However, some courses that have honors modules (HMs) may be appropriate for a shorter format. The decision will be made between the discipline and the honors chair.
- 9. Is there a possibility of a 15-week SRT that switches to F2F if the pandemic improves?**
The return to face-to-face is dependent on several factors. Most importantly, there must be agreement that the pandemic is not persisting in the region and health officials declare it safe to return to on-campus operations.
- 10. Can more 15-week classes be added to the schedule if enrollment builds?**
The composition of the spring schedule is an enrollment management issue. Deans and department chairs will monitor the schedule closely, and if sections fill faster for courses in 15-week formats, they will add more sections in that format. They will also reduce classes as necessary.
- 11. Will I be paid to convert my 15-week class to a 7-week class?**
Faculty have always have taught in shorter terms over the years, including this last summer, and have not been paid to adapt their courses. Montgomery College was unique and was among the few that provided a stipend for SRT training, but the financial resources are constrained. Some technical assistance and expert guidance may be provided to faculty in this process. No additional pay will be provided to convert these courses.
- 12. How many sections would a faculty teach at one time?**
This will be decided by the chair, dean and faculty. Usually, the typical teaching load will be spread over the 15 and 7 weeks or over the two 7-week semesters. Faculty members may also teach in the winter session as part of a spring teaching load.

13. Who decides what sections I teach and in whether I teach 7 or 15 weeks? Do I get an opportunity to express my preferences?

The practice at the College is for faculty to work with their chair and dean and present their preferences to them. The chair and dean will consider faculty preferences when creating the revised spring semester.

14. Can full-time faculty teach all five 7-week courses in the first half the semester and have an extra-long summer?

Full-time faculty are under contract until the end of the academic year on May 21, and they should be available to teach until that date, according to the needs of their department and program enrollment.

15. Will I be required to teach in Extended Winter Session?

No one will be required to teach in this session. It will be completely voluntary as it has been in the past. Faculty members may choose, however, to teach a winter class as part of their spring teaching load.

16. I am not interested in teaching in shorter terms, and I want to only teach in 15-week session. What should I do? Would this impact my ability to teach in summer?

While your chair and dean will do their best to accommodate your request, it may not be possible to assign an entire 15-week schedule based on the student enrollments and demand in your discipline. Individual faculty load assignments are managed among the chair, dean, and faculty member. Summer assignments are based on student demand, department needs, program enrollments, and faculty qualifications and availability.

17. What if a faculty member has one or more classes in Spring Pt. 2 that do not run? How will faculty make load?

The intent is to develop a schedule that will avoid this occurrence. Additionally, offering more flexible course schedules, with both 7-week and 15-week formats, is designed to maintain, and hopefully increase, enrollments for the spring. Steady enrollments will lessen the likelihood that faculty cannot make their load. When registration opens in October, we will offer a smaller number of sections than we actually anticipate will run. This will allow us to add seats as needed, as they fill. Some Spring Pt. 2 enrollment will be predicated on students passing Spring Pt. 1 courses. Deans and chairs will use historic pass rates in making their decisions. If there are cases where a course must be cancelled, it may be possible to assign a faculty member to a different section. Developing a flexible spring schedule, and adding classes as demand indicates, is the best way to ensure a schedule where faculty are able to make their load.

18. Is there any impact for faculty teaching preferences in spring on summer teaching? If I teach in a 7-week format in spring, would that give me a higher preference for summer teaching?

No. Faculty assignments of summer courses are made based on student demand, department needs, program enrollments, and faculty qualifications and availability.

19. Can we schedule the classes as we did in summer; longer times of day with fewer, more concentrated days (TWR, 10-1, for instance)?

The 7-week format does include the option for longer class sessions and fewer, more concentrated days. At the same time, it is important to remember to have course scheduling that allows students to take two or three courses during each 7-week session. The dean and chair will analyze the courses, examine which courses would logically be paired and determine what length of time, and/or more concentrated days makes sense to maximize students' ability to register for related classes.

20. How will finals week be handled in the first 7-week term? Will faculty be expected to grade during spring break?

Final exams will be scheduled on the last class day of each 7-week term. After Spring Pt. 1, there will be a 2-week break (including spring break) before Spring Pt. 2 to allow faculty to submit grades and prepare for the second 7-week session. Just as in the fall semester, Spring Pt. 1 (first half-semester) and Spring Pt. 2 (second half-semester) will have sufficient time for final grades. Keep in mind, faculty will teach fewer sections in Spring Pt. 1 than they would if their entire load was in a full semester, which will mean fewer final grades will need to be posted at one time.

21. Can sequential courses (i.e. 101 and 102) be linked courses in each of the 7-week sessions?

Any course can be linked. If the idea is to offer them in sequence, i.e., 101 and 102 sequentially, this is one of the benefits of the 7-week schedule. If the idea is to offer them during the same 7-week session, or have one in a 7-week format and one in the 15-week format, these are also opportunities for the spring semester. The first step is to discuss the schedule clustering with the dean and chair and identify the best schedule that will maximize student success.

22. How will registration be handled for students who take a prerequisite in Spring Pt. 1 for a course in Spring Pt. 2? Will there be time for their grades to be submitted so the students can register for Spring 2?

The prerequisite issue will be handled similarly to what happens between Summer I and II. Students register for spring while taking prerequisite classes in fall, and they register for summer classes while taking prerequisite classes in spring. This is no different in a 7-week session.

23. Is there a limit to the number of credits (or courses) students can take in a 7-week session?

Students will be advised to spread out their schedule and take the same number of credits over the three parts of term. Students will be advised to take fewer classes to focus on two courses in the compressed format. Also, students will be encouraged to utilize the three parts of term to take their courses in sequence for the 7-week session(s) and other courses in the 15-week format. Ideally, a student will not take more than two 7-week classes at one time.

24. Will course content be deleted to fit into a 7-week format?

This should never happen. It is important for deans and chairs to make expectations clear during assignment of the classes. The 7-week course format is compressed, which means that the same amount of material is covered in a shorter period of time. The reduced time does not translate into reducing the course or changing the student learning outcomes. No one expects the faculty to lower academic standards. The student learning outcomes and rigor must remain at the same levels, as has been the case in our summer courses, which have been offered over many years.

25. Will 7-week classes affect regional or programmatic accreditation?

No. Both the 7-week and the 15-week course formats impart the requisite number of contact hours. Academic content and rigor are the same regardless of format, as they are in the summer and winter sessions. If a shortened format makes it difficult for students to meet certification requirements, such as clinical hours, the course will be offered in a longer format.

26. Students may be as confused about a class being accelerated as they are with the SRT format. We need strategies in place to make this format clear to them. They often do not know the class they sign up for is accelerated, which is a problem when it's twice the speed.

While notifying students is a challenge, the College is committed to providing a wide-spread, aggressive campaign to reach students through multiple messaging formats and proactive advising by academic advisors and counselors. The College messaging campaign will include an explanation of the accelerated format. While it may be new to some students, it has been available for several years at the College and many students are familiar with this option. The 7-week format is one of the standard formats at the College, and the outcomes have been equal to, or better, for student success outcomes

27. There is not a lot of time to space out learning in an accelerated section (5 or 7 week). Frequent communication is helpful, such as sending announcements frequently, helps students to remember the outstanding assignments.

The recommendation to communicate frequently is a very good practice. The need to communicate frequently has also been emphasized in SRT and other trainings as well. Time on task remains the same and as such, students will take fewer courses in a shorter format. The fewer courses in a shorter period of time will assist both faculty and students to focus and meet the course objectives effectively. It will also help students to take courses in sequence, accommodate the difficulty our students are facing due to the virus, and provide them the opportunity to continue to balance their lives and education effectively during the pandemic.

28. How does a shorter session help working students? What about students who get sick during the 7-week session?

The shorter terms help students in a variety of ways. First, students can determine their work hours to accommodate their course schedule. Second, their schedule will be for fewer weeks which will allow them to pick up additional work hours once their courses end, while still progressing at the same, or a higher, level toward their degree. The shorter sessions also allow students to reduce the number of classes they take at a time and this helps them to focus more deeply on the courses. In addition, the shorter course length appeals to employers because students are finished more quickly. Further, these students will make more progress toward the degree in less time. This helps them to prepare for promotion or another better paying job at a faster pace. Students who become sick during any part of any semester may need to seek a medical withdrawal or leave of absence during a course.

29. Is a shorter/accelerated session counter-productive to other-abled students?

The evidence in the literature does not support the assertion that other-abled students are disadvantaged. On the contrary, intense, shorter courses can be beneficial to other-abled students and helps them to complete their coursework at a faster pace. This is because the shorter length of the course also includes more intense interaction during the shorter period. Other-abled students benefit from the deeper engagement which does not disadvantage their learning. However, when a 15-week format is considered preferable for achieving course outcomes, there is always the option to offer sections in the 15-week format at the same time.

30. Will services like the library and WRLC be available for students?

Similar to the spring and summer, the library and WRLC services are available to students in a virtual format. The on-campus services provided by these two units will resume once on-campus classes resume, and students and faculty return to campus.

31. Will we have a more rigorous placement process to place students into courses? Will ACCUPLACER be available for placement?

The pandemic has changed how we do placement, and the deans and chairs of English, reading, and ELAP have determined how placement will be done while the ACCUPLACER is not available. The placement process is as rigorous as it has been previously. There is no change except that standardized testing is not available currently.

32. Can Blackboard (Bb) be made available earlier to the faculty so they can build out their courses in Bb rather than building the course in a test site and converting it later?

Blackboard sites are made available to faculty approximately one month before the start of the semester. Faculty are welcome to build in those live sites but risk losing content if the course is cancelled or re-assigned to someone else. The best practice is to create the course in a development site and copy it over at the appropriate time. This eliminates the potential for issues with instructional material being unintentionally deleted. While it is not as convenient, it is preferable to ensure faculty do not lose their work. At the same time, we will investigate this option for the spring semester and keep faculty posted on the outcome of those discussions.